THE BLACK CAT

JUNE 1904

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The Black Cat

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From Blonde to Brunette.*

BY ANNA McCLURE SHOLL.

FREDERICK CURTIS was surprised at the warmth of his hostess's greeting, not knowing that he was regarded as a potential celebrity by the lion-huntress.

That a novel of his was now in the hands of the publisher's readers, she was, of course, ignorant, but Curtis's wonder over his effusive reception was increased by his haunting consciousness of this fact. He had lived in a state of humility and regret from the hour when a brawny expressman had pitched the neat square bundle into the wagon with the indifference of one who daily tosses about such symbols of destiny. All the crudities of his first novel marshalled themselves continually before him. He had the feeling that he had, at last, betrayed to a small. select, and trained circle the full measure of his inexperience.

The drawing-rooms of his hostess resembled the plan of Paris, innumerable unknowns and half-knowns radiating from centres held by acknowledged celebrities. Curtis recognized two authors whose books had passed the one-hundred-thousand mark, several painters of note, and a famous scientist. Pretty women sur-

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rounded these lions, who were roaring gently in acknowledgment of their proffered flatteries.

One woman seemed, however, to be holding a court of her own. She was a stranger to Curtis, but his attention was instantly attracted to her because her physical appearance was in perfect accord with his description of one of the characters in his novel. She was extravagantly, marvelously blonde; her hair a soft, tawny mass of gold; her long lashes a deep gold, darkening towards the ends; her skin of that creamy whiteness which seems to hold yellow tints; her features regular and cold. She had the air of a coquette, the indefinable look of a heartless woman, as if the sunshine which nature had poured over her held a sinister element. Such an element had leavened the personality of the blonde woman in his story. Curtis gazed at her as if fascinated.

The group of admirers surrounding her was dominated by a large, solemn-looking man of prosperous, important demeanor, wearing his middle age as he might have worn a velvet robe of state. In his manner towards the lady was an element of ownership.

Curtis felt a friendly hand on his arm. Turning, he saw Watson, an old college chum, who, having leisure and social position, amused himself by studying and tabulating the types of people found in good society, as others study and classify the so-called lower classes.

"Watson! You're just the man I want to see. Who is that blonde beauty hypnotizing all those men?"

"Where have you been living? That is Mrs. Olga George, the fascinating widow — widow of Binwood George, the sugar-man."

"The George who died about four years ago?"

"The same. For the last two years I suppose she has had on an average a half a dozen proposals a year. For some inexplicable reason she has accepted William Humbert."

"Who?" Curtis said in a startled voice, thinking he had not heard aright.

"Humbert, the publisher, that big, pompous-looking man bending over her — heavens! Curtis, what's the matter? don't you feel well?"

Curtis had suddenly turned quite pale and was leaning back

against the wall staring at the widow in a helpless, half-paralyzed way.

Watson repeated his question.

"It's all up with me," was the lucid answer.

"All up with you? What has their engagement to do with you?"

Curtis groaned.

"It has everything to do with my novel."

"You've written a novel? I thought you would; you had such strong symptoms. But I don't see what your novel has to do with their engagement."

Curtis groaned again.

"Why, man! Humbert's got it! I'm done for there."

"Will you please tell me what you are talking about?"

"There's a blonde woman in the book. If I had seen this Mrs. George every day for a year I couldn't have written a more accurate description of her — the very ripples of her hair, the slow turning of her head when she's spoken to, the masklike features, the skin with that look of gold under cream — "

"The point still escapes me," Watson interrupted impatiently. "What of it if you have a blonde woman in your book? She's not the only specimen in the world. Humbert will be all the more likely to accept the novel, for they say he is helplessly in love. Anything blonde would catch him as a baby jumps for red."

The gloom in Curtis's face deepened to despair. "Anything blonde and sweet and lovely, yes, but I've made her a perfect fiend — scheming, malicious, without heart, on the scent for a fortune. Did the sugar-man leave much?"

Watson threw back his head with a peal of laughter. Curtis looked savage.

"It's no laughing matter. I've been two years on that novel. I'd rather Humbert would take it than any publisher in town. Tell me, Watson, is this last awful conjecture a correct one? Is she a fortune hunter?"

"My poor boy, I am afraid she is. The sugar-man died almost insolvent; but then you never can tell how much money people have, they put up such bluffs. What I am morally sure of is that

she would never marry a poor man. Did you really make your blonde lady out such a jade?"

"Perfectly hopeless. She makes all the trouble in the book."

"She is probably the most interesting character in it, then, and the strongest. The sweet heroine is generally as complex and stimulating as junket. But if your publisher is in love he has probably parted with his last grain of humor. I'm sorry for you, Curtis. Are you sure the decision doesn't rest with the readers?"

Curtis shook his head mournfully.

"No; the final decision is always with Humbert."

"Brace up. He may see a hundred-thousander in yours, despite the blonde vixen."

"It's not that kind of a novel."

"What's its name?"

"'The Winning of the Epilogue'"

"The title doesn't hit me very hard. Did you send it in under your own name?"

"I gave a pen-name and my office address."

Watson mused.

"I am afraid you are up against it, for Humbert is pretty far gone."

Curtis stood in deep thought a moment.

"Do you know the widow?"

"I met her once at a dinner."

"What's she like?"

"You'd have to marry her to find out. She's that kind."

"I want to meet her," said Curtis. Won't you introduce me?"

"Now?"

"Yes, now. A fearful fascination possesses me. I want to see how much further this fatal parallel extends. My poor novel!"

Two hours later Curtis was still a part of the circle surrounding Olga George who, because of a deep-rooted preference for young men — always poor, unfortunately — had not only welcomed him warmly, but, influenced by his good looks and air of intellectual distinction, had kept him by her side, showing him marked attention. Her interest was increased by an inexplicable element of coldness and hostility faintly apparent under his studied courtesy.

Curtis became conscious after a time that the ponderous publisher was not unaware of her interest. He cast searching glances at the young man, which held a warning to keep off forbidden ground. He was evidently in love as only a middle-aged widower can be in love.

When the young man rose at last to take his leave, Mrs. George pressed his hand warmly.

"Won't you come to see me?" she said, in a soft, golden voice that suggested slow-moving honey. "I am at home Monday afternoons and evenings. Ah! there is my dear Estelle. Before you go, Mr. Curtis, I would like to introduce you to Miss Humbert."

A dark, handsome girl, with irregular but noble features, had joined the group. She acknowledged her future stepmother's introduction in a somewhat haughty manner, though Curtis instinctively felt that the touch of resentment was not against him, but against the effulgent and smiling matron. He had a sense of revival, as if he had stepped from a cage of yellow glass into a fresh spring air.

Estelle Humbert answered his remarks with "yes" and "no," but her eyes were grave and attentive. Curtis conceived an instant liking for her.

On his way out Watson joined him. Curtis's predicament had kept him in a good humor all the evening.

"Well, what did you make of the widow? Is she a twin to the lady in the book?"

"That I can't tell yet. She is inscrutable to a newcomer. Exactly what I did make out was that Humbert is ridiculously in love with her. My novel is doomed in that quarter."

The next Monday evening Curtis called on Mrs. George. His bump of self-esteem not being over-developed, her interest in him added to the freight of curiosity he had brought to this second meeting.

William Humbert, looking very big on a little gilt chair, frowned as Curtis approached to greet him, a distinction not bestowed on the other young men. To Curtis's tentative remarks he made only blunt replies, until his daughter, who had been watching the two men, perceived the situation and came to the rescue.

Curtis followed her gratefully to a divan by the open wood-fire, which threw pretty lights and shadows on Estelle's clear, girlish face. He found himself feeling glad that she was girlish and unspoiled yet, with something of the thoughtfulness of maturity in her manner. Olga George, by contrast, looked like an over-ripe product of late, sultry summer.

"You write, do you not?"

Curtis thought of the novel, and his impatient misery of resentment returned upon him. If he could only get it back, and dye Henriette's hair before the great William Humbert read it. The publisher was at that moment gazing with adoring eyes at a blonde woman.

"Yes; I have no better sense than to write," he said, snappishly.

"My father has spoken of your work. I heard him say once that he wished Frederick Curtis would send him a novel."

Curtis gave a guilty start.

"I don't believe he knows yet you are Frederick Curtis," she went on. He is slightly deaf, and he rarely gets a name when introduced. I must tell him."

Curtis looked at her imploringly.

"Please don't."

Her surprise was in her face.

"Why not? He has a great admiration for your work."

"I — I have a fancy that your father and I wouldn't hit it off, so to speak — that is we have not — "

She smiled, but her smile was a little sad.

"I know what you mean. You are thinking of his manner to you just then. I beg you to believe it was not personal."

Curtis was silent. He understood that she had not been unobservant of her father's resentment of him, as of a possible rival.

"Estelle, an old friend of mine, Mr. Jordan, is anxious to be presented to you."

Olga George had come up to them, looking, in her gown of old lace, like a great yellow rose. She introduced Mr. Jordan to the girl. Then, turning to Curtis, said: —

"I have not had a word with you yet. I have been wanting to tell you how much I enjoyed your short story in the April Heaton's. Come and sit here with me a few moments, and tell

me when you are going to write your novel. Of course, you 're going to write one."

"I hope so," he said, with a slightly satirical accent, "if only to escape the charge of being eccentric."

She kept him by her a long time, her interest in him being the fruit of her desire to conquer his coldness and to break down his reserve. That night was the beginning of the beleaguerment of Frederick Curtis.

William Humbert sat in his private office reading a manuscript that had come to him on the wings of his readers' enthusiastic and unanimous commendation. For once they had capitulated in a body.

The great man had given orders that he was not to be disturbed unless the building was on fire. Hour after hour he read, the frown on his brow deepening, the lines about his mouth becoming sterner. It was as if the woman he adored lived in these pages in a frightful caricature, a hideous perversion. Even the eyelashes of Henriette were dark at the ends. The parallel was almost too striking to be accidental. Humbert wondered if the wretched author were a rejected suitor of his blonde goddess. What a contemptible and unmanly revenge!

The golden lady whose gold held so much dross blotted out the rest of the story for Humbert. He was blind to the "quick dramatic movement," "the splendid color," "the rippling humor," "the great broad issues." His readers were a pack of fools! He would dismiss them all, sweep 'em all out, and put in a new set who would not mistake a rushlight for a new planet. He jabbed his broad thumb fiercely against the electric button.

"Take this manuscript to Mr. Gage," he thundered, when the office boy appeared, "and tell him he is to return it at once to the author."

A few moments later Mr. Gage entered, looking pained. His report of this novel had touched the zenith of enthusiasm.

"Have you dictated no letter of rejection to go with 'The Winning of the Epilogue,' Mr. Humbert?"

"No; I haven't, and I don't intend to. Such work is beneath comment. Pack it off just as it is."

Mr. Gage stiffened.

"It is too admirable a novel not to be accorded the usual courtesies."

"It 's the worst trash that has come into this house for months, and that's saying a good deal."

Mr. Gage bowed and retired. He wondered what was back of this unjust verdict.

When the expressman brought in his novel, Curtis regarded it with a calm indifference which was not wholly the fruit of the fact that for a week he had been expecting it.

Nothing mattered now except Olga, yet he had not become so utterly dazzled by her blonde loveliness that he did not wonder sometimes at this complete and radical change in his own point of view. He would go over step by step his acquaintance with her, trying to discover the psychological moment when dislike changed to tolerance, and tolerance to unwilling liking, and liking to a queer sort of choking fervor, as if he had been suddenly overtaken by a glorious gold mist in which all objects were magnified. As he groped around in it dazzled, he sometimes longed for the clarity and freshness represented to him by Estelle Humbert, but the ideal she had become could not withhold him from the pursuit of Olga George.

He knew that he had no right to be making love to her, but he excused himself on the ground of psychological investigation.

Estelle, he divined, was watching him with mingled emotions; relief that his devotion to Mrs. George, or, rather, hers to him, might end in the abandonment by that lady of the future rôle of stepmother; and a keener, sharper feeling which might be interest in himself, or resentment that through him her father would suffer.

He had about made up his mind to clear his vision by going away for a while. When he had put his novel in the office safe he got out some time-tables and pored over them.

While he was trying to determine in which direction he wished to flee, the office door opened softly and Olga entered. All the color left his face as he rose to greet her. Her keen glance went from him to the time-tables scattered on the desk.

"Are you contemplating a journey?" she asked, with a little smile.

Curtis looked embarrassed.

"Why yes, I thought I'd better get away for a bit. You see, I —"

She waited.

"You see, I'm in a position now that's not quite honorable."

She smiled.

"Yes, it's quite honorable," she said slowly. "I have broken my engagement with Mr. Humbert."

"Olga! — when?"

"This morning — by letter. You see, Frederick, I don't think I was ever really in love with him. He was overmastering and he took possession of me somehow. I've worn chains for six months, but now," she gave a sigh of relief, "I'm free."

"To be mine," Curtis said, quickly.

An amused expression passed over her face.

"I'm not so sure of that. I'm not so sure that you want me to be yours."

"Olga!"

His voice was sharp with reproach.

"Well! You are at liberty to prove that you do," she said, smiling, "perhaps after a while you will be able to convince me."

"If I could only convince you now."

"I believe that you believe that you love me."

Her words, her teazing look, aroused his fervent protests. He longed to prove his devotion by some instant act. Yet at the same time he realized that there was truth in what she said. She had gained an unaccountable influence over him, but he felt more like a slave than a lover.

That same day he met Estelle Humbert at a dinner party.

"I wish to tell you," she said, gravely, "that Mrs. George has broken her engagement with my father."

Curtis was silent.

"Did you already know it?"

He was silent.

The girl looked at him intently, then turned her head away.

"It is as I thought," she said.

Two weeks of strange enchantment went by. Curtis was at once happy and miserable. He had never been less sure and never more sure that he was in love.

One morning a letter came bearing the address of the great publishing house of William Humbert & Co. It was directed to Benworth Chatham, the pen-name Curtis had chosen. Opening it, he found, to his astonishment, that it was a very brief communication from the head of the house himself.

"Dear Mr. Chatham," it ran, "if you have not already placed your novel, 'The Winning of the Epilogue,' I would be indebted to you if you would do me the favor of submitting it again to this house."

Curtis had scarcely given a thought to the novel since he had placed it in the safe. He took out the package now and, opening it, turned over the pages listlessly. A rejected manuscript had always had to him something of the smell of the tomb about it. It lay, at least, in a kind of limbo until his contempt and scorn of it was somewhat abated and he could bear to send it out again.

Well! Humbert could have it if he wanted it. He was about to do it up again, when, turning a page, his eye was caught by this sentence: "Her blondeness had a sinister quality as if nature, in endowing her with pale yellow tints, had thereby cut her off from sincerity and good faith."

As if by a lightning flash the meaning of the letter was clear. Humbert, sore and resentful over his broken engagement, wished to take this means of revenge, by giving to the world, in cold print, a scathing portrait of a blonde woman.

All Curtis's loyalty rose to Olga's defence. Humbert should have the book, but not until the author had dyed the wicked lady's hair black, put belladonna in her eyes, and bleached her skin of any ivory tinge. If Humbert then rejected the novel Curtis would have full proof of his villainous intention.

He set to work that night to turn a blonde woman into a pronounced brunette. The task was not easy, for the tints of the lady were interwoven with the text like a tissue of gold threads, casting over the whole a baleful brilliancy. When they were cut out the story seemed duller. As a brunette, the wicked lady no longer glittered, but seemed almost as heavy and respectable as the virtuous heroine.

The artist in Curtis revolted against this dimming of the picture. He thought once that he would tell Olga of his predica-

ment, explaining that the portrait of the blonde woman had been painted in before he knew her, but this might only complicate matters. She would no doubt resent the fact that he had ever fancied a blonde woman could be so diabolical; furthermore, she might urge that an engagement between them would be, to say the least, singular, while a book of his containing such a caricature was before the world. And Curtis believed that their engagement was imminent. He was so sure of it that, though he could ill afford the expense, he had joined a party she was getting up to go to California for February and March. They were to start in a week's time.

He sighed and went on with his hair-dyeing.

A few days later William Humbert received the manuscript.

He shut himself in his private office and began the reading, with as much enthusiasm as if he were a child poring over the tale of a wicked witch. Ever since Olga had broken the engagement, his wounded spirit had been haunted by the portrait of the treacherous blonde woman in the only novel he had ever rejected for personal reasons. It seemed to him, in retrospect, a masterpiece, the living, breathing image of the lady who had played him false. He was eager to study it again, to brood over it, to give it to the world. Olga should see herself in a pitiless mirror. Even the advertisements should proclaim the fact that the book was a profound psychological study of blonde wickedness.

He settled down to the reading with an air of intense satisfaction. He had even remembered the coquette's name, Henriette Delmere. He turned over the first pages hastily that he might come the quicker to what was now for him the only interest of the book.

"Oh, the devil!"

He stared at the passage before him, scarcely believing his eyes.

"Henriette Delmere entered. She was a tall, well-built woman, with abundant, dead-black hair, a clear olive skin, and very large black eyes."

Humbert gasped, then turned over more pages. She seemed to get darker and darker as the story progressed, and, in fact, poor Curtis had been excessive in his use of hair-dye, as all novices are. As for the lady's eyes, those orbs, by the middle of the novel, had

become of such dense blackness that they must have been all pupil. Never had belladonna been more liberally used.

The changes ceased there. Being a man, Curtis had completely forgotten that the lady's dresses should harmonize with her coloring, and, in consequence, Henriette Delmere, throughout the novel, wore greens and blues and other tints only suitable for golden hair and a fair skin.

Humbert stared helplessly at the manuscript. There was but one thing to do. He would request the author to call, ask the meaning of the change, and offer to publish the novel on condition that it be put back into its first form.

The next day Frederick Curtis's card was brought in to Humbert. Under the engraved name was written the pen-name he had used.

Curtis! Could it be possible this was the young man who had haunted Olga's drawing-room? If so, all was explained, the breaking of her engagement, the changing of a blonde into a brunette. The author was in love with the widow and she reciprocated his love.

Humbert's face grew stern and set. He would prove the charge by asking Curtis to change the brunette into a blonde.

The young man entered the office with a bright, confident manner. His air of happiness confirmed the dreadful suspicion. He held out his hand in a friendly way.

"Mr. Humbert, your letter came just in time. I leave this evening for California."

Humbert had heard of Olga's California party. That Curtis was to be a member of it supplied the traditional silver lining to this black cloud. A scheme presented itself instantly to Humbert's mind which might be carried out in the young man's absence.

"Going to California, Mr. Curtis? That doesn't fit in very well with our plans. We think that we have a good seller here" — he tapped the manuscript — "and it is of vital importance that we get the book out as soon as possible."

"You are going to publish it, then," Curtis said, with a strange indifference in his manner.

"Yes; we hope to publish it. We think it a strong work."

"Why was it so summarily rejected, sir, when I first sent it to this house?"

A purplish flush mounted to Humbert's forehead. "That, Mr. Curtis, I am not at liberty to explain to you," he said with dignity. "Circumstances alter cases, as you are aware. But I hope you will consent to let us have 'The Winning of the Epilogue.'"

"Of course you may have it."

They then discussed the terms. In conclusion, Humbert said to him:

"Would you have any objection to our proof-readers putting through the proof without you? You say you will be away at least two months. The novel should be out by that time for the spring trade. We cannot accomplish this if the proof has to go all the way to California. Or you could depute some literary friend to represent you, to read your proof for you."

Curtis hesitated. The lover and the writer strove in him. The lover conquered. He could not be away two months from his enchantress at this time, when she was almost his.

"I put the book into your hands," he said.

. . . . . .

Olga George was seated on a low wicker chair on a terrace overlooking the ocean. She seemed more blonde than ever, as if she had absorbed the brilliant California sunshine.

Near her sat a good-looking man who bore about him an indefinable atmosphere of wealth. He was gazing with fond, admiring eyes at Mrs. George, who, some hours before, had promised to be his wife. He was worth twice as much as Humbert, and Olga was, therefore, just twice as much in love with him.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked this California millionaire, whose name was Eastbrook.

"I 'm thinking I 'll have to break poor Curtis's heart."

"How he has haunted you, poor devil!" said Eastbrook, with the patronage of the successful suitor. "But you ought to be used to it, dearest."

She sighed.

"I never do get used to it. I always feel so sorry for them."

"You are tender-hearted. You are everything that is good and lovely," he said, with fervor. "Here comes Curtis now," he

added, impatiently. "Well, this is the end of our afternoon. You must tell him soon that we are engaged."

Curtis came forward, bearing a bundle of mail.

"I have letters for you," he said, as he greeted her, "and I believe I have my novel for you, too, unless I am very much mistaken. It came in this mail."

Taking out a knife, he cut the strings of a package, and drew from its wrappings a tempting-looking book, bound in yellow and gold. It bore the title, "The Winning of the Epilogue."

"Well, they have got it up nicely!" Curtis exclaimed, the first enthusiasm he had felt over his novel since his obsession by Olga now stirring in him. "That's an attractive cover, don't you think?"

"Very pretty," Olga said, as she might have praised a child's toy. "But don't you want to look it over?"

"No, indeed," Curtis said gaily, "I want you to read it first, if you will do me that honor."

She smiled up at him.

"It is I who am honored."

Next morning Curtis awaited her anxiously. He had not realized how great was his desire that she should approve of this, his first book. He had a poetical idea that she might reward him by accepting him. These two months had been troubled ones. She had kept him constantly on the rack by her coquetries with his rivals, but he still hoped for the engagement.

He heard the swish of skirts and looked up. She was descending the staircase of the hotel. Under her arm she carried his book. She did not smile as he greeted her, and her manner was frigid.

"You did not like it!" he exclaimed.

She made no answer. He followed her across the hall and on to the porch, which at this hour was almost deserted. There she turned and faced him.

"After reading your book," she said, icily, "I can never again believe in the sincerity of your love."

"Olga!" he cried. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. After an insult like this, it is impossible to receive you on the old footing."

"What do you mean?"

"You are obtuse, or a good actor. In this novel I found a hideous caricature, a blonde woman whom you have made a perfect devil. How could you give such a thing to the world unless you have been trifling with me?"

"A blonde woman!" Curtis gasped, a dreadful light suddenly flashing through his brain. "Why there isn't a blonde woman in the whole book."

"Do you mean to insult me further?" she said, her eyes becoming hard as steel, her lips white and thin. "Take your book, Mr. Curtis. I see it all now. You were paid by a publisher to avenge him. You need never attempt to see me again."

He reached out his hand mechanically for the volume. Then he watched her as she swept haughtily away.

When he had recovered a little from his stupefaction he turned over the pages of his novel. It was too true. By some hideous transformation, the fruit of a publisher's treachery, Henriette Delmere was again a pronounced blonde, lighting up a dark and tortuous career with gleams of bright yellow hair.

Curtis groaned. He stood for a long time like one half-paralyzed. Then, stepping into the office, he asked for time-tables for the East, and sent a long telegram to his lawyer.

During his journey to New York he gave himself up to his bitter thoughts, the fruit not only of his rejection, but of the revelation of Olga George's true nature. Her face, as he had last seen it, hard and mocking, haunted him. The whole affair was beginning to seem to him like a queer, golden nightmare. He wondered if he had ever really been in love with her.

These thoughts alternated with reflections on William Humbert's perfidy. He was sorry that he had to sue Estelle's father, but the publisher had gone too far.

. . . . . .

"My father is sorry not to see you, but he has an attack of gout to-day. If his private secretary could attend to the business —?"

Estelle's dark eyes looked into his with entire frankness and friendliness. There was no doubt that she was glad to see him, and that she bore him no grudge because of the law-suit now in full swing.

"May I stay and talk with you a while?" he asked timidly.

"Please do! It seems a long time since I have seen you. But the business — shall I call the private secretary?"

"No. It is only some stupid detail about the suit. Personally, I can't tell you, Miss Humbert, how much I regret taking this action. I sincerely admire you — your father — I —"

"Oh! don't regret it. My father says it is a splendid advertisement for your book. For a first novel it's just jumping."

"I never thought of the law-suit in that light," Curtis said.

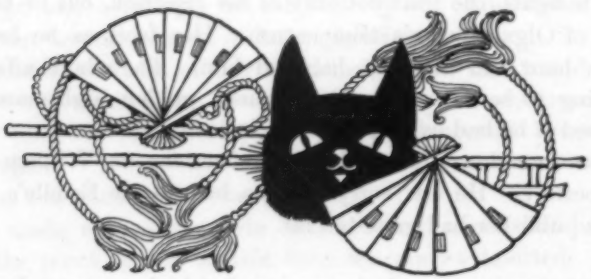
She smiled. "How could you think of it in any other! But then," she added, archly, "you are not a publisher's son."

Two hours later he parted with Estelle.

"May I come again?" he said.

. . . . . .

On the day "The Winning of the Epilogue" reached the one-hundred-thousand mark, its boom and the law-suit having proceeded together, the court awarded Frederick Curtis ten thousand dollars damages for the unwarranted use of hair-bleach by an unscrupulous publisher. But Curtis called the damages Estelle's dowry.



The Wakening of Wildwood.*

BY STANLEY EDWARDS JOHNSON.

TWENTY years ago nobody went to Wildwood, and yet, twenty years ago, its mountains were as picturesque, its sunsets as gorgeous, the white moonlight, streaming through the tops of its tall, dark pines, was as glorious and impressive as to-day. But now, from an unknown cross-roads, it has become one of the most noted and important places on the White Mountain map of summer travel. The little place that slumbered is bounding with life. From the first day of July to the first week of October, every year, more baggage is handled at Wildwood Junction in a single day than had entered the township in the whole course of its existence prior to its awakening. And its awakening was brought about by the great transformer, Death. This is how it came to pass: —

In the "best room" of the lonely hillside farmhouse of Abraham Jenkins — a room seldom opened except to the minister and book agents — were assembled, one November day, the clans of the Jenkinses and Perkinses, to attend the funeral of the late Martha Perkins Jenkins, the farmer's wife. A stalwart son, the eldest of a family of nine children, had, after Abraham himself, given voluble testimony to their high appreciation of the departed. The leanest of a covey of maiden sisters of the deceased took the widower aside and said: "I only hope she knows how ye'r feelin' fer her; it would be a good bit satisfyin' to her, I'm sure. She sez to me once, sez she, 'Ef I go, I know that Abe'll marry some young thing that never'll tek no interest in the young ones, and they'll be left ter shift.' But ye wouldn't do that, would ye, Abe?"

Disregarding this pointed appeal, Abraham Jenkins cleared his throat and addressed the assembled company: —

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"I've jest decided ter tell ye, s'long's yer all here, that I've sort o' felt ez ef I sh'd foller her soon. So I've bought a lot in the graveyard — to be paid fer in instalments — and when I die I want yer ter put me by the side of Marthy. Then I shell rest in peace. Them's my final instructions." Turning to the maiden sisters of his lamented wife, he added: "I know ye'll tek good care o' them thar youngsters that Marthy sot so much store by." Then he broke down and sobbed wildly, "Oh, Marthy, Marthy, why hev ye gone?"

. . . . . .

Four months after the funeral another Mrs. Abraham Jenkins was installed in the lonely farmhouse, and she was all that the first Mrs. Jenkins had foreboded. Young and frisky, pretty Matilda Brice had attracted Abraham Jenkins at a Grange sociable, and his mourning had ceased from that moment.

That there should be great indignation among the Jenkinses and more or less astonishment in the community-at-large was a matter of course, but it was some months after the wedding of the widower before a marble slab mysteriously appeared in the new Jenkins lot in the village cemetery, bearing the following inscription: —

The first stranger to notice the oddity of this bit of mortuary sculpture was a touring bicyclist. What could it mean, he wondered. The sexton, whom he happened to catch on the premises, denied all knowledge of the significance of the inscription, but he grinned. The bicyclist was followed not long afterwards by a visitor in a buggy. Soon the country swains, with their companions, drove from places twenty-five miles away to read and ponder upon the strange inscription. Picnic parties came and gazed upon it and, after eating luncheon in the grove of tall pines —

now known as Wildwood — went away to spread the intelligence of the peculiar monument in Wildwood Cemetery and extol the charms of the neighborhood.

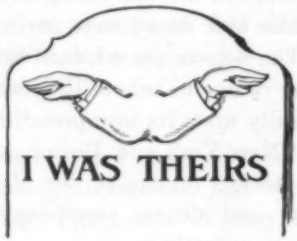
The years sped swiftly by, and bits of moss and lichen gathered in the deeper lines of the carved index and clung to the angles of the sculptured letters, but an increasing army of visitors noted that the traces of time and decay were periodically cleaned away by unseen hands. The seasons passed, each bringing new curiosity-seekers from a wider radius to behold the inexplicable legend and exercise their ingenuity upon its interpretation. Summer boarders began to come from New York and Boston, and tourists from the South and the flat, treeless regions of the Middle West, to whom the towering peaks and dense, sweet-smelling woods were as inspiring as they were unfamiliar.

Then, to the amazement of everybody, when Abraham Jenkins became a widower for a second time, the lonely slab was discovered to have a companion on the opposite side of the family lot. It was thus inscribed: —

This second dazzling marble gravestone appeared one day in March. Before the season was over Wildwood had built its first summer hotel and planned and subscribed the capital for the narrow gauge branch around Swallow Hill to connect with the railroad at what is now Wildwood Junction.

The new road had hardly been running two seasons when Abraham Jenkins, white-haired and tottering, followed his second wife to the graveyard to which, after his funeral, all eyes were again turned. Among the townspeople it had always been suspected that the first slab was put up by the Perkinses and the second with money left by the consort who had been Matilda Brice. These conjectures were confirmed when the will of Abraham Jenkins was read and a gravestone was erected in

accordance with his last instructions, between those of his departed partners, and it was also conceded that in death he had proved equal in wit to all his wives' relations, for this was the sculpture it bore, surmounted by hands attached to arms spread out as if in benediction: —



Tourists to-day throng to Wildwood in greater numbers than ever. Tournaments are played on the golf links of Hotel Wildwood and the tennis courts of The Minster, near The Cloister Pines. Bear Nook Glen, Artists' Point, and Lectern Ledge are visited by shoals of sight-seers in buckboards, in automobiles, awheel, on horseback, and afoot, and the views from Sunset Rock were never finer. But the tide of curiosity has ebbed away from the little cemetery on the hill where the bones of Abraham Jenkins rest between those of his two wives, and they and the feuds of their families are almost forgotten.

The Skyscraper in B Flat.*

BY FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK.

IN Chicago it would not have been a skyscraper, for it was only seven stories high, but here it towered far above every building in the city. It was built by Hickson W. Bond on the corner of Platte Avenue and T Street, a locality which only a year ago had been an almost valueless suburb, given over to corn and potato patches. But a real Western boom had since inspired the town, streets had been extended and paved, Platte Avenue had a car line, houses and stores were going up like mushrooms, and there was not nearly shop and office room enough for the demand. Consequently every one with a little capital was building.

Bond found his title to his lot disputed, and he had scarcely broken ground when he was checked by an injunction. The Greenberger Brothers, who controlled half the real estate business of the town, had bought up the contending claim, and the matter was fought out in the courts. Bond won, almost to his surprise, for his adversaries had spent much money and were confident of success.

With his surprise was mingled some apprehension. The Greenberger Brothers were hard men to outwit, and they did not easily forgive any one who succeeded in doing it. They made their money like Hebrews and spent it like Christians, to their own ends. They had it in their power to embarrass him seriously, for he was operating a large business on a small capital, which had been sapped by recent litigation.

He proceeded with his building, however, and was relieved to find that the Greenberger Brothers made no sign of hostility. He strained his credit, but the building was finished early in October, with a great flourish of trumpets from the city press, proud of its

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new skyscraper. It was constructed, as usual, of steel girders covered with a thin shell of masonry, and was handsomely fitted up with marble and mosaic, with electric elevators, and mail chutes, and complicated heating apparatus. It was christened the Platte Building, and was almost filled with tenants as soon as its offices were opened for rent. The Central National Bank established itself upon the ground floor, and, at the prevailing rates of rent, Bond foresaw a golden harvest. He needed it badly, for he was skating on thin ice.

All went very well for a time. Bond's rents began to come in, and he was elected a member of the Board of Trade. Then, no one seemed to know how, a report began to go about that the Platte Building was unsafe, that the building laws had not been enforced, and that the framework was insecure. Bond privately attributed these slanders to his late antagonists, but fortunately he was able to dispose of them by a signed statement from the Building Inspector. But such rumors always leave some poison behind.

Late in the afternoon of the 18th of December, several of the occupants of the upper floors of the Platte Building noticed a faint tremor of the framework as if from the jar of heavy traffic outside. It was extremely slight, however, and at five or six o'clock almost every one left the building without having given the phenomenon a moment's thought.

Several business men returned to the building after dinner that evening, to deal with the unusual work incidental to the end of the year. These, when they arrived, found the watchman of the bank in animated conversation with two policemen in the outer hall. He had telephoned for help, under the impression that an attempt was being made to undermine the vault.

The whole building was vibrating with a jarring tremor. The floors tingled unpleasantly under the boot soles, and a faint, tense humming sound seemed to come from every inch of the walls. It was quickly clear that it could be from no burglarious mine. The police searched all the adjoining ground. There was nothing to account for the disturbance, and none of the neighboring buildings appeared to be affected in the least. There was no heavy traffic on the street at that hour and there was no wind.

Some one suggested an earthquake, but an earthquake is not localized in a city block. Bond was called by telephone. He arrived half an hour later, and found a large and increasing crowd on the sidewalk, touching the walls experimentally to feel the tremor, and listening to the increasing, droning humming of the framework. He at once started up-stairs to investigate, in which adventure no one cared to follow him. The whole building was empty. The scores of office doors were shut and dark. The elevators had stopped at six o'clock.

The cashier of the bank presently arrived in a state of much perturbation, and, after fussing about for some minutes, went to the vaults and came out laden with ledgers and tin boxes. Upon this suggestion, all the office occupants began to think of rescuing their books and papers. Cabs and express wagons were summoned, and the drivers were offered handsome rewards to go up to the higher floors where the owners of the endangered valuables dared not go.

By this time the oscillation of the building was really alarming. It wavered exactly as a bridge does at the passage of a heavy train. The news had spread rapidly through the city and a mob of a thousand persons very soon filled the street. Among these were most of the tenants of the Platte Building offices, but few dared to go inside.

Those heroes, however, who had ventured up-stairs, were working manfully. Excited by the shouts from below and by their own haste and danger, they fell into a perfect frenzy of rescue. Office doors were smashed recklessly open. A number of small safes came thundering ponderously down the circular stairway, and ledgers and boxes were dropped by dozens down the well. The men burst open locked desks, flung armfuls of documents and stationery out the windows, and turned on all the electric lights till the tall building glowed like a factory.

Presently some one raised a cry that the building was rocking, and the crowd, which now extended for several blocks, surged wildly back. It was true. Almost imperceptibly, but certainly, the dark top of the skyscraper was swaying against the starry sky. The workers inside the building came down-stairs at a run, and were cheered frantically as they emerged. The few police, taking

advantage of the crowd's retreat, established regular fire lines, and warned every one from the adjacent buildings. It was not hard to keep the affrighted people back, however, and every face was upturned toward the enormous structure that was expected immediately to come crashing down.

But it did not fall at once. The swaying motion increased, but very gradually, while the humming note of its vibrations rose to a sound of tremendous volume. Gently and slowly to and fro it rocked, and a shade further at each oscillation. In a few minutes the shell of masonry and stucco began to peel off and fall, in lumps at first, and afterwards in great sheets. Through the exposed iron skeleton streamed floods of electric light from the still burning lamps. The whole immense crowd fell silent, and there was no more noise or shouting. The magnitude and mystery of the event overawed them.

Just inside the fire-lines stood Bond, his hands clenched in his coat pockets, impotently peering from under his hat brim at his tottering fortunes. They were all locked up in that unstable frame of steel. So far as any theory of the catastrophe was concerned, his mind was blank. Only he felt convinced that an enemy had done this, and, being Western bred, he was not disheartened; — only wrathful and perplexed.

Hour after hour passed. In spite of the midnight December cold the crowds grew, and still the skyscraper did not fall. It swung ponderously, far out to the right, pausing as if hesitating to topple over, and then far back to the left. The slam of swinging doors resounded crashingly from every floor as it reeled. It seemed impossible that the fabric could endure longer, though it was a mere network of locked girders, almost as strong and elastic as a steel bar.

All that night the firemen and police swarmed helplessly about the tottering building. Bond had offered a thousand, then five thousand dollars, for a successful scheme for steadying it. All street cars were stopped within four blocks. They sounded the earth in the neighborhood and found it solid. Men were even sent into the sewers with delicate instruments to detect any subterranean trembling, but none could be observed. All the disturbance was localized in the building.

When the gray dawn came up over the prairie the skyscraper was still standing, though it swayed now like a flagstaff in a high wind, and it was very evident that its collapse was at hand. All the glass was broken from the windows, a great part of the masonry had fallen, and it looked like the gutted ruins from a fire. As it reeled from side to side with a terrific rush and swing the creak of the drawing rivets could be heard through the humming of its tense framework.

Bond's only hope now was that it might not destroy too much other property in its fall. He had been furiously busy in helping to clear the adjoining buildings. He had been on his feet all night, but he did not feel either cold or fatigue. Only he decided at this stage to telephone to his wife, who must be in a state of extreme anxiety, for she had sent two or three messenger boys to find him during the night.

The nearest telephone happened to be in the store of a piano-dealer in the next block. The proprietor, like most of his neighbors, had remained down town all night, and was just sitting down to a tray from a restaurant when Bond entered.

As he opened the telephone cabinet something snapped loudly with musical ring in the shop. Bond, whose nerves were at concert pitch, jumped, and the proprietor swore.

"Another string gone!" ejaculated the dealer. "Every blessed piano in this shop, I believe, has snapped its B-flat string since last evening. It's the noise from that cursed building of yours."

Getting up, he fingered half a dozen keyboards till he found one still intact, and struck the B flat sharply. The note was exactly attuned to the vast hum from the shaking skyscraper. A moment later and this string also flew asunder.

"The Platte Building is tuned to B flat," observed the musician, dryly. "Every piece of metal has its musical note, you know. If you struck this note inside your building it would set every frame vibrating. You haven't had any brass bands playing there lately, have you?"

Bond's mind caught the idea like a flash. He recollected some elementary experiments in physics, and the laws of vibrations. He thought hard for a half minute, and then hurried back to the street, without having touched the telephone.

As he returned toward the skyscraper he glanced up, and his heart misgave him. The risk was too great. The enormous dismantled framework seemed to sway till it almost overhung the adjoining buildings. But, mustering his nerve, he went on, pushing roughly through the packed crowd. The police, recognizing him, let him through the lines, but when they saw him approach the crumbling doorway, they ran after him, shouting. But by that time he was already upon the stair.

Bond had not been used to much violent exercise lately, but he went up the eight flights of the circular stairway at a run, without noticing them. The jar and sway of the floors was like the sickening heave of an earthquake. Through the broken walls the light poured freely, mingling with the glow of electricity in the halls. The floors were littered with every sort of office supply — the doors were splintered and swinging. The building looked as if it had been shelled and afterwards looted.

On the topmost floor the motion was so violent that he was obliged to lean against it to keep his balance. The wreckers had not ascended so high, and all the doors were still shut and locked along the hall. In fact, few of the rooms on this floor had even been rented, and it was used mostly for storage.

At the extreme end of the hall a door bore the gilt sign: —

GOTTHARD KLEIN, VIOLIN MAKER.
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS REBUILT AND REPAIRED.

The door was locked, but Bond burst it open with his shoulder. There was a bright outer office, with several glass cases, badly damaged, containing beautiful violins. Beyond this a door stood ajar into a room, from which proceeded a clear, musical tone.

Bond rushed towards it. The inner room was fitted up as a workshop, and was half open to the outer air by the fall of the masonry. On an elaborate joiner's bench was clamped a bass viol, and upon it a peculiarly shaped bow ran regularly to and fro across two strings, with a monotonous iteration of sound. This bow was attached to a flexible steel rod that played from a purring electric motor beside the instrument.

Bond scarcely knew what he had expected to find, but he was astonished. There was no one in the room. But he brought a hammer smashing down upon the whole musical apparatus, and the ceaseless B-flat drone was silent. Then after a glance about the place he went down-stairs again, sliding most of the way on the banister rail.

For half an hour after he reached the sidewalk again there was no visible change in the condition of the skyscraper. It still reeled and tottered. Then, by minute degrees, the oscillations grew slower and weaker. In an hour and a half it was plain that the building was regaining its balance. It was then nearly eight o'clock.

Bond thereupon looked up the address of Gotthard Klein in a city directory, and started to find him, with cold rage in his heart. The place turned out to be a pretty suburban cottage, with early smoke rising from the chimney. The door was opened by Mrs. Klein herself, a middle-aged, fresh-faced woman, with a faint German accent.

"Is Mr. Klein in? I must see him," demanded Bond, sternly. "I am the owner of the Platte Building, where he has his office. You know, of course, what has been going on there?" he added, at the woman's look of bewilderment.

"No," she said, doubtfully. "I have no time to read the papers. Gotthard is here, yes, — but so sick! He will not know you. The doctor says it is pneumonia. He should not have worked yesterday. He had to come home and go to bed at three o'clock. I have not closed an eye this night."

She led Bond in, and gently opened a door into an adjoining bedroom. There lay the violin-builder, flushed with fever, his eyes shut, but muttering incoherent German words. Sobered by this sight, Bond stepped back and softly closed the door again.

"Your husband builds violins. Does he do anything else?" he asked.

"He makes also guitars, sometimes, and mandolins. And he invents, oh! wonderful things. He is working now on a violin to play itself, like the machines to play pianos. But I ought not to tell you of this. It is not finished."

"Hum!" said Bond, meditating. "Do you know that he went

away yesterday and left the electric power turned on and his invention running?"

"No — heavens! Will he have to pay for all this time? Is it running yet?" she ejaculated, horrified in all her thrifty soul.

"No," said Bond. "I turned it off."

The Daughter of Mail-order Pete.*

BY MARTHA MICHEL MARTIN.

THE firm of Maler & Company was neither collectively nor individually acquainted with Mrs. Henry Van Lander, and yet they knew as much about her personal affairs as did that matron herself. The truth is, Mrs. Van Lander was a tradition with Maler & Company, which was imparted to every new member of the office force. Rather strange, you will say, that a corporation of such magnitude should concern itself about so humble a creature — but the fact that they did concern themselves about her goes but to prove that even a mercantile house is not wholly without sentiment.

It was back in the early seventies that Benjamin Maler conceived the advisability of selling goods by mail, and he, in association with three other equally far-seeing men, formed the company which was so soon to revolutionize the world of trade. Their first catalogue was very modest, offering to the public only such articles as could be bought in a well-regulated dry-goods store, but year by year they increased their stock, until in nineteen hundred one could buy from them anything from an ash barrel to an automobile.

On their mailing-list were names the owners of which a drummer could never find, and one of the first to receive a Maler catalogue was Peter Thurston, an Indiana farmer. Peter was a farmer in name only, and he did not live up to his name. He was, in fact, a book-worm — not one that squirmed among the classics, but a traveler over lighter literature. He was, you might say, just enough of a worm to be an enemy to a farm. Peter read everything in the nature of an advertisement, and when Maler's catalogue came to his hand, he regarded it as a treat.

"This is a sort of a-cat-in-the-bag business," he said; "but I'll

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just see what a fellow will get if he buys without lookin'." He sent for a pair of shoes, and they were better and cheaper than any he could buy at home, so after that, whenever he or his wife needed anything, they sent to Maler & Company. This practice became so steady that in time he was known to his friends as Mail-order Pete, which name pleased him very much, and he so signed his letters. It was when his daughter, Geraldine, the Mrs. Henry Van Lander of our story, was born that he sent to Maler's for the announcement cards. These were dainty affairs displaying a stork holding a tiny envelope in his bill in which was a card bearing these words: —

GERALDINE MALER THURSTON
OCTOBER 17, 1876.

"Mail-order Pete has a daughter," was how the clerks at Maler's greeted each other, after the event became known, and from that moment she was adopted as the child of the firm. After Geraldine's arrival double interest was attached to her father's letters, as the nature of the order bespoke her progress or retrogression. When Peter sent for a crib, the office knew Geraldine was sleeping alone. When he got a rattle, they knew she was old enough to notice. When he bought a go-cart they could see her take her first steps. A rush order for castor oil convinced them that Geraldine had mastered the meaning of "from hand to mouth." A letter requesting a felt-covered baby-corrector brought before them the picture of Geraldine *standing* in a corner. They also had calls for mumps, measles, and whooping-cough cures. So on through the successive stages of life she passed, until there came the fatal day when the office of Maler & Company, as one man, felt a personal loss. Geraldine Thurston would be no more. Eighteen years had passed since the stork had carried his message to the friends of Peter and his wife, and now other cards were to follow. The engraver was authorized to announce that

MR. AND MRS. PETER THURSTON
REQUEST THE HONOR OF YOUR PRESENCE
AT THE MARRIAGE OF THEIR DAUGHTER
GERALDINE MALER
TO
HENRY VAN LANDER

"This would not have happened had I been a single man," grumbled Mr. Thompson, the head bookkeeper, when he was advised of the invitations. "She belongs by every right to Maler & Company, and I do not know what you dunderheads are thinking of to let a stranger come and carry her away."

"What would you have us do, Thomp?"

"Do! Well, you are a slow lot. Are there no trains between here and Potterville? Is there no such thing as introducing yourself to a life-long customer, meeting his daughter, and winning the prize? No, you let a hoosier, probably not fit to tie her shoestring, run the race alone. That may be your way, but I am made of different stuff. I only wish my Charlie was older."

As time passed the name of Van Lander was allotted more space on Maler & Company's books than that of Thurston had ever had. "Geraldine married rich" was the comment of the office, as orders came in weekly. They were for incubators, corn shellers, fruit gatherers, fruit evaporators, hay presses — in short, anything that would make out-door work easy. For the house the Van Landers ordered an automatic dishwasher, an instantaneous meal-cooker, a no-grind coffee mill, a save-your-hands potato and fruit parer, sweep-easy brooms, self-wringing mops, one-minute irons, and hundreds of other devices listed by Maler & Company in their catalogue. Surely, life with Mr. Van Lander was to be robbed of all inconveniences for Geraldine, and even Mr. Thompson became reconciled to her fate.

"I believe there is nothing we have advertised that the Van Landers have not written for," said Mr. Maler, as he finished a letter from Geraldine asking if he would send her so small an item as a paper of pins.

"Everything except a tombstone," answered Charlie Thompson, who had grown up and succeeded to his father's desk.

"Even that has come," exclaimed Mr. Maler. "Here is a postscript requesting rates on lettering monuments. Mrs. Van Lander wants to know which would be cheaper, to have 'Henry Van Lander' put on, or just 'Van Lander.' I am sorry to see this young woman left a widow. She, like her father before her, has been a good customer of ours, and it would be but courtesy for us to express our sympathy. Suppose you run down there,

Charlie, and see how matters stand. You might also tell her we never put inscriptions on tombstones."

"Here's my chance," thought Charlie. "Geraldine as a rich young widow is even more to be sought than was Geraldine, the daughter. Father took it to heart that we let her marry out of the office the first time, so I'll try not to let it happen again. I shall make myself useful to her now, and maybe, after a decent time has elapsed, I shall be invited back to Potterville on a more cheerful mission. It wouldn't be bad to manage a farm which must be a testimonial to the ingenuity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."

Nine o'clock the next morning found the young business man at Potterville.

"Can you direct me to the farm of the late Mr. Van Lander?" he asked one of the loungers at the station.

"That's a good one! How'd you know he was late?"

Not understanding the allusion of this facetious creature, the enquirer turned to a more likely looking man at the door and asked the same question.

"Come now," answered this individual, "don't give him a bad name, he ain't always late."

"What have I struck?" wondered young Thompson. "This can't be the State Insane Asylum. Maybe I should inquire for Mrs. Van Lander."

The third time he asked the question he omitted the "late," and substituted "Mrs." for "Mr.", and soon found himself on the road to the model farm.

Following the simple directions given him, the stranger could not believe that he had reached the right place, when he stopped before the remains of what should have been a "testimonial to the ingenuity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." In the centre of a half-acre of ground stood a neglected two-story house. The rusted relics of labor-saving machinery were scattered about the yard, and served as playthings for five ragged children. An unkempt man and woman sat in the doorway, poring over a book, which, as he came closer, the visitor saw was a copy of Maler & Company's catalogue.

"I beg your pardon," said the representative of this firm,

lifting his hat, but can you tell me how to find the Van Lander farm?"

"I don't know no sech place," said the man, without looking up.

"I guess he means this place," ventured the woman.

"Why, is *this* Geraldine?" came involuntarily from Charlie Thompson.

"Now, how'd you know my name? I never laid eyes on you before."

"I have always known you, Mrs. Van Lander. I represent Maler & Company, and your father was one of the first customers of the house. The cards announcing your birth were printed by us, and since then the firm sort of adopted you."

"Now, that's kind, ain't it? I never knew you noticed me. You see Mr. — what'd you say your name is? Oh, yes, Thompson. Well, you see, Mr. Thompson, we ain't got no farm yet, but when we do get one, we've got everything to make work on it easy. You see, it takes so much to buy machinery, that we never have laid by enough to get the land. By the way, you never answered my last letter about the tombstone!"

"That's the sad duty that has brought me to Potterville — to speak to you about the monument. Mr. Maler has a personal feeling for you — you are so old a customer — and he sent me down to represent him and express the sympathy of the house."

"Now, that was real nice of him!" answered the woman, with a slightly surprised air. "We thought, so long as we had a little left, we'd better get that fixed up, because, even if we never have a farm, folks will know where we're put away. That amounts to something in a world where we are so soon forgot. Don't you think so, Mr. Thompson?"

"I do indeed, Mrs. Van Lander," was the reply. "When — er — did your husband die?"

The listless man sitting beside the woman suddenly straightened up, and she herself rose to her feet.

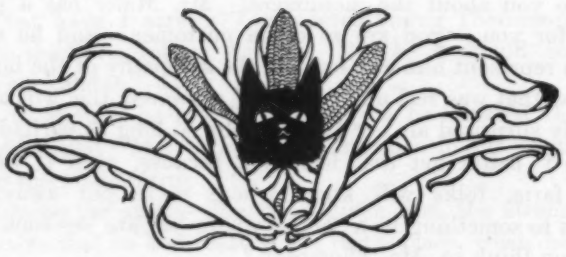
"Die!" she exclaimed, "Why, he isn't dead — *this* is Henry!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I'm sure — and his, too. You see, we judged from your letter that you were now a widow."

"The idea!" exclaimed Geraldine. "Why, Henry's too thoughtful to leave all the worrying over a tombstone to me!

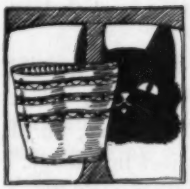
He knows I'll have the children to look after when he is gone. The reason I wrote about the name is we ain't got as much as we used to have. All that father left me is nearly gone, and I did think at one time we'd have to sell something to buy the stone, but you've got such bargains in your last book, we can afford it. You say you don't put names on? Well, send it along anyway, and Henry can paint it on, himself!"

"Young man," called Geraldine, after Charlie Thompson had made his farewells, "send a life-preserver with the stone, because we are going to have the farm on a creek, and one of the children may fall in, so we'll need it on the place."



The Patient in Twenty-Two.*

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN.



HE sun, creeping over the cornice, had reached the west wall of the hospital. In Twenty-two the nurse laid aside her book and stepped softly across the room to draw the shade.

Slight though the sound, it aroused the old man in the bed. He stirred, yawned, thrust forth a bandaged arm, and then a sound one, and stretched rather cautiously. A slight smile, almost wistful, flitted across his bearded face as he caught the nurse's footstep. She had been his one diversion, his solitary distraction for seven weary weeks, ever since the night they dragged the unconscious ruin of his former self from beneath the burning timbers of the passenger wreck, and none knew so well as he how potent had been her aid in the long fight for his life and his sight.

"Nurse?"

"Oh, you're awake, Mr. Dunham?"

"Seem to be. What time is it?"

"Five minutes to one."

"Lands! Have I slept that long? Why, he'll be here at two, won't he?"

"Dr. Strange? Yes."

"He's goin' to take these bandages off'n my eyes today, ain't he?" inquired the patient, eagerly.

"I imagine so. He said yesterday that he could see nothing to prevent it. Everything has gone beautifully."

"Lord! It'll be grateful to look around again an' see things. I'm wondering what you look like, nurse. I ain't never seen you."

"You will presently," laughed the girl.

"An' me," said the old man, soberly. "I'll get a chance to see what's left o' Bill Dunham, eh? Half a arm, half a leg — gone!

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"Yep, gone. Gone in that blazin' Hell of a train wreck! Half a leg fer one youngster, half a arm fer t'other. But mebbe it was worth it. Them kids did sure git off all right, didn't they, nurse?"

"Without so much as a scratch." Then innate sentiment superseded the professional calm for a moment, and the girl cried: "Oh, it was splendid of you, Mr. Dunham! It was the most magnificent bravery I ever heard of! How did you ever dare to go back into that fire for those children, after you yourself had succeeded in escaping?"

"I guess they'd 'a' been there yet if I hadn't," snapped the old man. "They wa'nt no one else tryin' to save 'em. They wa'nt much darin' 'bout it, nurse. I seen 'em pinned in there, an' I went back an' pulled 'em out — that's all. It was jest my dooty."

"Duty!" murmured the girl.

"Yes, dooty!" repeated Dunham, almost doggedly. "I allus done it as I seen it. That's why they've kept me sheriff back in Caley County this twenty-four years, nurse," he finished proudly.

"I don't wonder."

"Wa'nt but two fellers ever got away from me," continued the patient, reminiscently. "One of 'em died in the woods last January. T'other feller — oh, way back, second year I was sheriff — he got clean away, an' I'm glad of it. He sure killed a man, but — oh, I dunno. He done it when his blood was up. I guess I'd 'a' done the same, too. Jim was a dum good boy."

"Was Jim the — murderer?" asked the nurse, absently.

"He wa'nt no murderer at heart, nurse. He was as good a feller 'sever walked. That's why I'm so all-fired glad I never ketched him. If I was to meet him tomorrer, I'd have ter take him back, but it'd hurt me bad. But I guess he ain't a great deal to fear now, nurse," sighed the old man, gloomily. "'Twouldn't be much work gettin' 'way from a cripple like me, would it?"

"There, Mr. Dunham," said the girl, soothingly. "Don't worry about it. Just wait until Dr. Strange takes off the bandages and you look around again. You'll forget all about the other."

"Mebbe so. They ain't many things worse'n bein' blind. This here Dr. Strange must be a smart chap, eh? They ain't many could 'a' put my eyes together again the way he did, air there?"

"Indeed there are not. Hardly another surgeon would have attempted the operation he performed upon you. It was almost the first of its kind. Why, even Dr. Strange seemed nervous!" This in an unwarranted burst of confidence. "When he first saw you, he turned quite white, and for a moment I believe that he trembled. But he made another splendid success, nevertheless."

"Thank the Lord fer that! It'll do me good to get a look at him, too. Pretty near time fer him, ain't it?"

"Pretty near," said the nurse, arising. "I'll get you some lunch, Mr. Dunham."

The little meal was over. A sidelong glance at her watch informed the nurse that but a minute lacked of the hour of two. At the uplifting of her eyes, the door opened softly.

Steady, keen-eyed, Dr. Strange stepped to the bedside with a quiet:

"Good afternoon, Mr. Dunham. Good afternoon, nurse."

"That you, doctor?" said the patient. "You goin' to take 'em off today?"

"I'll see." The surgeon leaned over the bed. "Yes, I think that we can remove the bandages safely. Will you draw the blinds, nurse?"

The girl darkened the room.

"Thank you. That is all."

"Why — don't you want me to stay?" asked the nurse in astonishment.

"No."

The order was indisputable. The young woman left the apartment wondering.

"Now, Mr. Dunham, if you will turn your head. That's right." The stitches were snipped swiftly. "To the other side, please."

The outer bandages deftly unwound, the inner followed.

"There, Mr. Dunham." Then the doctor stood erect by the bed. His face was curiously white and set, and he stared down at the old man with an odd, expectant expression.

"Air they off? Why, so they be. Yes, I kin see the winders now, over there." Dunham blinked uncertainly in the dim light. "An' the table an' the bottles on it an' the chairs! Thank God, I *kin* see!"

"Yes, you can see — now," said a tense voice.

"An' you, doctor." The old man closed his eyes for a moment, and then strained them toward the doctor. "I kin jest see you sorter dim. I guess your clothes air black, ain't they? Oh, I kin see the buttons on your coat now; yes, it's all gettin' clearer. An' your white collar an' — an' — an' ——"

The sheriff of Caley County sank back upon the pillows. His weak eyes dilated, his breath came heavily, the patches of skin about his beard turned white, his remaining hand clutched the spread convulsively.

"Jim — Mathewson!"

The surgeon's nerves relaxed with a long sigh.

"Yes, Jim Mathewson, Bill," he said, quietly, seating himself on the edge of the bed.

"Jim! Jim!" muttered the old man, staring in fascination at the man beside him. "Air — air you Dr. Strange, Jim?"

"That is the name I took — twenty years ago."

"An' you're a doctor now?"

"Yes. I've been practising here for nearly fifteen years."

"I — I guess you must 'a' done a lot o' good, Jim."

"I hope so," said the doctor, simply.

"Ain't no doubt of it. Nurse says you're the biggest man in your line in the hull East."

"Yes?"

"Yep. Oh, Jim! Lord God, Jim! Why did it ever happen?"

Dunham's grizzled head sank to his chest in grief-stricken contemplation of the discovery.

The surgeon regarded him thoughtfully. He knew perfectly the conflict which raged in the old man's mind. He had foreseen it all for weeks. Perhaps the bandages had remained in place a few days longer than was necessary, to fend off a little this very scene.

"Jim," the sheriff said, looking up finally, "you did kill old man Peabody, didn't ye?"

"Yes, I killed him!" A wave of anger, the first sign of emotion, crossed the impassive face.

"I never blamed ye, Jim. But — oh, Lord! — think what it means, boy! I've got to take ye back there!"

"I know it," replied the surgeon, calmly.

"It's hangin' — or worse. Them Peabody devils never forgit. Like's not they'll shoot ye on sight, afore I kin stop 'em. An' it's my cussed dooty to take ye back to that!"

"I know that, too."

"Ye do?" the sheriff blazed out. "Then why the devil d'ye sit there like a dummy an' stare at me? Why don't ye clear outer here? I can't stop ye, Jim. Go, boy; fer God's sake, go, an' keep outer my sight till I kin leave this town."

The doctor smiled drearily.

"It isn't that, Bill. I've thought it all out, years ago. There's a man's blood on my hands; and I made up my mind that if the law ever asked me to pay for it, I'd pay. I should never have gone back, you may guess that easily enough; but somehow I knew I'd have to answer for it, sooner or later, here or up above — and I'd rather answer here, if I can."

"You're a damn fool!" cried Dunham, violently.

"Moreover, I'm treating you professionally," said the surgeon, with a faint smile. "You're not a well man yet, by any means."

"Jim." The old man choked. He leaned forward and clutched the other's knee, as he stared hard into his face. "Jim, ye knew me when ye see me first, didn't ye?"

"After the accident? Yes."

"An' ye knew I'd reckkernize ye, if I ever got my sight back?"

"I wasn't sure. I've changed a good deal."

"But, takin' the chance, ye went ahead an' done what no other doctor could 'a' done — ye saved my eyes, when ye could jest as well 'a' cut 'em out, an' me never been no wiser? When ye could 'a' gone scot free by leavin' me blind?"

"It's my work," smiled the surgeon.

"Well — I'm dummed!"

For a time the sheriff regarded the other in silence, his intense admiration of the man embittered by his more intense sorrow at the situation.

"Jim," he said at last, "air ye married yet? Lord, boy!" he cried, seeing the ineffable pain that had sprung into the surgeon's eyes. "I don't want to make ye feel no worse, but air ye?"

"No," murmured Mathewson, gazing at the hand with which he drummed on the little table, "not yet."

"Goin' to be?"

"I am engaged. We had — hoped to marry in the Spring."

"Did ye tell *her* about old Peabody?"

"Certainly," said the doctor, sharply. "Do you suppose ——"

"Did she fergive ye?"

"I told her the whole story. She thought, I believe, that I had atoned for my crime in some measure by what good I had been able to do since, and I think she understood the great provocation. At any rate, she was willing to marry me. Yes, she forgave me."

"Then see here, Jim," said the old man, vigorously, "if a good woman on this airth had sense enough to fergive ye, d'ye think for a minute that the Almighty God ain't got sense enough to do it, too? D'ye think he wants ye to go back there an' git a rope 'round yer neck?"

"I don't know, Bill." The doctor sighed wearily. "I only know that I decided long ago to pay for my sins right here on earth if ever I was asked to. Whether a further expiation awaits me across the river, I shall learn — pretty soon."

"Bah!" growled the sheriff.

"So go ahead and get well," concluded Mathewson, arising and touching the bell. "And when you're fit for travel, we'll go back and face the music, if you say so. You needn't bother about extradition papers."

"But don't ye see, Jim," cried Dunham, in exasperation, "I've gotter say so! I've gotter take ye back with me, whether I want to or not. It's my damned dooty, an' I've never shirked it yet!"

"I know that. You needn't now, Bill. Here's the nurse."

The girl glanced curiously from the physician to the patient, who lay back with drawn features in the twilight.

"Everything is as it should be, nurse," said the doctor. "It seems to be a complete success. I don't think that we shall need any medication other than those tablets — the stimulant, you know — one every four hours."

"Very well, doctor."

"And be careful of the light, of course." He took the patient's hand, formally. "Good afternoon, Mr. Dunham; I'll look in on you tomorrow."

"Good afternoon, — doctor," murmured the old man, gazing after him.

"Well, Mr. Dunham," said the nurse, brightly, when the door had closed once more, "How does it seem?"

"Seem? Oh, it seems — all right, I reckon."

"Well! You're not enthusiastic?"

"No, I ain't!" groaned the patient, turning restlessly upon his side and staring at the medicine table. "I'm — tired, nurse. I guess I'll take forty winks. You won't need to stay, will you?"

"Why, I suppose not," smiled the girl, as she smoothed the pillows. "Is that comfortable?"

Left alone to think it out, the old man stared in silent misery at the table for a long time.

"Dum stubborn boy!" he mumbled at last. "He'll go back, cuss him! An' I gotter take him! I jest gotter do it; they ain't no way outer it. 'F I don't, I'll be betrayin' the trust the people o' Caley County 'a' been puttin' in me all these years — an' I can't do that! Lord! Why don't he git outer the way? But he won't. That ain't Jim. He'll jest come here, an' come here till I git up, and then most likely ask what day we start back. An' then — oh, Lord! If they ever let him live to git tried, it'll be before Judge Lem Peabody, ten to one — an' him the old man's pet nephew!"

"Oh, I kin jest see the hull thing now! An' I gotter take him back to that! I gotter! I gotter!" repeated Dunham, dragging himself to a sitting posture, and glaring at the table. "I gotter remember that oath o' office, that I ain't never forgot yet. I gotter!"

Abstractedly, the old man turned to the bottles on the table, twisted them about and read the labels, mumbling over the written directions, until his hand touched the vial of pellets the doctor had indicated.

"Poison, eh?" he muttered, scanning over the little red letters. "By thunder! I could take it, to git outer this mess, I swan I could! Bah! Ye dummed old fool!"

For many minutes the old man gazed upon the tiny white pellets, fifty or sixty in number. He shook them about and finally smiled thoughtfully at them.

"Arter all, I dunno why not. It's — it's a dummed queer thing